



## MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT

# LEARNING CENTER

Michigan Hall of Justice • Lansing, Michigan

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**The justice system is vital to American democracy. We all need to understand how the courts work and the role the law plays in our everyday lives.**

That is why our Supreme Court created the Learning Center and why we put this booklet together for you. Look inside for more information and activities about the Michigan court system.



## Kid Justice Conquers Chaos Online Video Game

Lady Justice, her daughter Kid Justice, and their friend Kid Liberty know a lot about Michigan's judicial branch of government, but they need your help. People have been creating mischief at the Learning Center, and the three must find out who it is.

As Kid Justice searches for clues in the Hall of Justice, she finds many characters who offer pieces of evidence to solve the case. Information is all around her, but she must find where it is hidden.

Does Kid Justice find all the evidence in time to save the court system? Play the game at <http://courts.mi.gov/plc/KidJustice/> to find out.



### Words to Know

**Chaos**—Disorder and confusion.

**Evidence**—Facts used to prove a case. Specific types of evidence are used in court.

**Justice**—All people should be treated fairly in getting the advantages and disadvantages of our country. No group or person should be favored.

**Liberty**—Includes the freedom to believe what you want, to choose your own friends, and to have your own ideas and opinions. It also includes the right to express your ideas in public, to meet in groups, and to have any lawful job or business.

*This project was funded by a generous contribution from the Michigan State Bar Foundation. It is designed to help students fulfill the following MEAP standards: SOC.III.1.LE.1, SOC.III.3.LE.1, SOC.III.4.LE.1, SOC.III.4.LE.2, and SOC.III.4.LE.3. A teachers' guide with lessons plans accompanies the game. For a copy of the game and teachers' guide on CD-ROM, call 517-373-7229.*

# 3 Branches of Government

There are three branches of government. The U.S. Constitution defines the three branches of government as legislative, executive, and judicial. Michigan’s Constitution includes the same branches. They are present at the federal, state, and local levels of government.

These branches serve as checks and balances for one another. Each branch of government has its own responsibilities.



### Executive Branch

- Enforces laws
- Prepares and presents budgets
- Manages executive departments, services, and programs

#### Federal

- President

#### State

- Governor

#### Local

- Mayor; County Executive; Township Supervisor



### Legislative Branch

- Makes laws and ordinances
- Appropriates funds to other branches of government
- Creates agencies, authorities, and other public bodies

#### Federal

- U.S. Congress

#### State

- Michigan State Legislature

#### Local

- City Council; County Board of Commissioners; Township Board of Supervisors; Township Board of Trustees



### Judicial Branch

- Interprets and upholds laws
- Protects individual rights
- Punishes the guilty
- Manages information

#### Federal

- U.S. Supreme Court; U.S. Circuit Court; U.S. District Court

#### State

- Michigan Supreme Court; Michigan Court of Appeals

#### Local

- Michigan Circuit Courts; Michigan District Courts; Michigan Probate Courts

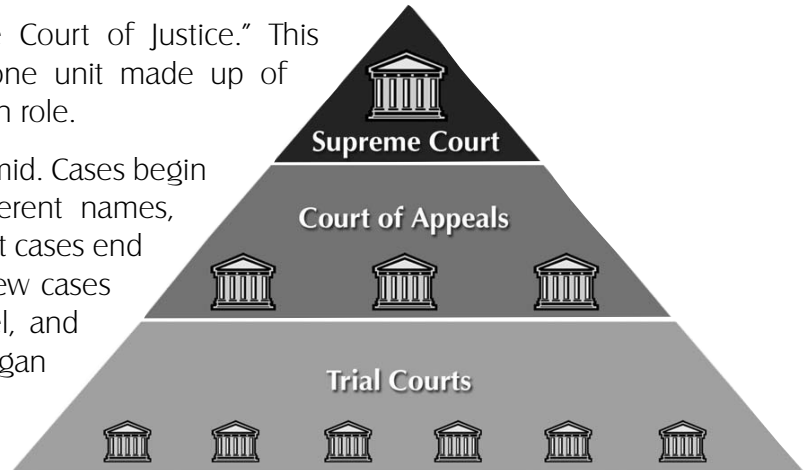
**Which Branch Is It?** DIRECTIONS: Place a check in one of the columns to the right for the correct branch of government for each of the following jobs:

	EXECUTIVE	LEGISLATIVE	JUDICIAL
1). Police Officer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2). Court Clerk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3). Secretary of State	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4). Supreme Court Justice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5). Mayor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6). State Representative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7). Governor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8). State Senator	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9). Attorney General	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10). District Court Judge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

# One Court of Justice

Michigan's Constitution calls for "One Court of Justice." This allows the court system to work as one unit made up of different courts, each performing its own role.

The Michigan court system is like a pyramid. Cases begin in a trial court. Trial courts have different names, depending on their responsibilities. Most cases end with a solution at the trial court. Very few cases move up to the Court of Appeals level, and even fewer go all the way to the Michigan Supreme Court.

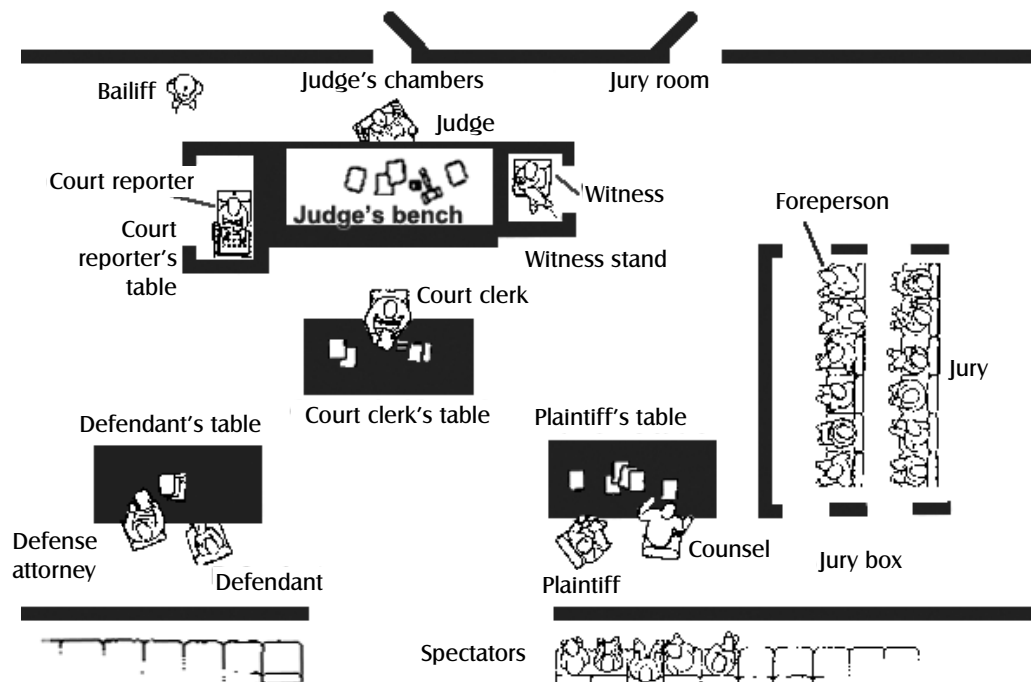


## Trial Courts

Trial courts are the types of courts familiar to most people. Almost all cases start here, and the majority of cases are resolved at this level. Trial courts are located in cities around Michigan, and every county is represented by at least three trial courts:

- Probate Court
- District Court
- Circuit Court

In a trial court, lawyers present their cases to judges or jurors, witnesses testify, and evidence is examined. Finally, a verdict is reached based on all the facts.



# Michigan's Supreme Court & Court of Appeals



Court of Appeals courtroom

The Hall of Justice houses two appellate court courtrooms. The Supreme Court courtroom is located on the sixth floor, and the Court of Appeals courtroom is on the second floor. Both courtrooms are open to the public when court is in session and can be reached by public elevators located north of the rotunda.



Supreme Court courtroom

## About the Michigan Court of Appeals

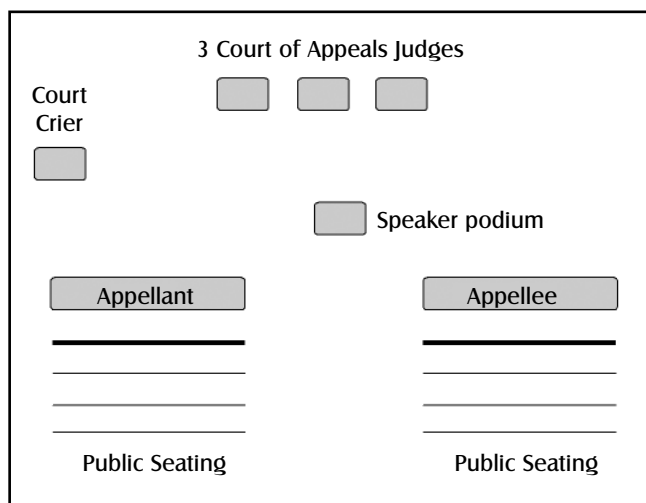
The Court of Appeals is the intermediate appellate court. Although divided into four districts for election purposes, the Court's twenty-eight judges sit in panels of three and rotate among the three courtroom locations (Detroit, Lansing, and Grand Rapids). In most cases, appeals to the Court are by right; that is, the Court must hear and decide the appeals. A decision of any panel of judges is controlling statewide and may be reviewed by the Michigan Supreme Court.

### Interesting Facts about the Court of Appeals

- Established by the Michigan Constitution of 1963.
- Decisions determined by the majority of a 3-judge panel.
- 28 judges, elected to 6-year terms.
- Total of 7,951 new filings in 2006.
- In most cases, the Court must hear and decide appeals.
- Chief Judge appointed by the Supreme Court to a 2-year term.

The Fourth District (Lansing) Court of Appeals courtroom is designed to be accessible and user-friendly to citizen litigants, attorneys, and judges. There are two conference rooms off the entryway for use by people appearing for oral argument. The attorney tables in the courtroom are equipped with power for laptop use, and the podium height can be adjusted for comfort level and

wheelchair access. The bench, which can seat either three or seven judges, is also equipped with power for laptops, and other useful features provide the judges with access to important information at the touch of a button.



Court of Appeals courtroom layout.

## About the Michigan Supreme Court

The Supreme Court is Michigan's highest court. The Court hears cases at its discretion and receives over 2,000 "applications for leave to appeal" per year. Each justice reviews every case to determine whether leave should be granted. Less than 100 cases are granted leave per year.

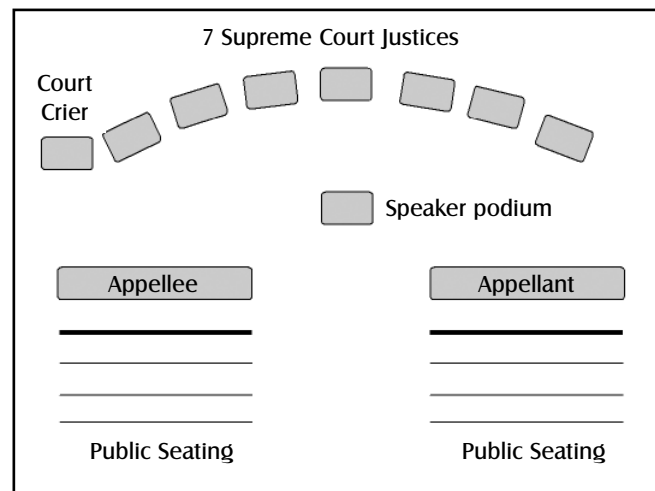
Cases accepted for oral argument may be decided by an order, with or without an opinion, a written explanation of the decision. These orders may affirm or reverse the Michigan Court of Appeals, remand a case to the trial court, or adopt a correct Court of Appeals opinion.

The Court hears oral arguments October-May of each term. Decisions are released throughout the term (August 1–July 31), following oral arguments.

The Supreme Court courtroom is located on the highest floor of the Hall of Justice, symbolic of the position of the Court within the state system. The decor, furnishings, and mahogany bench reflect the feel of the 1872 courtroom that housed the Supreme Court for nearly a century in the Capitol. Unlike typical American courtrooms, the Supreme Court courtroom is round. Reminiscent of a Native American sentencing circle in which young and old have a voice, it reminds visitors of Michigan's first lawgivers.

#### Interesting Facts about the Supreme Court

- Established by the Michigan Constitution of 1835.
- Decisions determined by a majority of the entire Court.
- Responsible for administrative supervision of all state courts.



Supreme Court courtroom layout.

## Symbols of Authority

### The Robe



Judges' robes were not always black. At different times during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, green, scarlet, or violet robes were popular. The custom of wearing black robes may have been adopted when English judges went into mourning at the death of royalty in the 1600s.

In the United States, Thomas Jefferson was against "any needless official apparel." Alexander Hamilton, on the other hand, favored both the robe and a wig. At the first session of the U.S. Supreme Court, Chief Justice John Jay wore a robe of black silk with salmon-colored facing, while the other justices were dressed in brightly colored robes.

### The Gavel



Our modern-day judge's gavel finds its origin in Scandinavian mythology. Archeological records show evidence of small metal amulets representing Mjollnir, the magical hammer of the god Thor. Thor was a god of the people, a friend of landowner and peasant alike.

Thor was a patron of justice; his oath ring could seal any contract, and the judge's gavel owes its origin to the hammer symbol of Thor's might and authority.

### The Scales



The scales of justice are a symbol of the weighing of evidence by a judge or jury to determine whether a case is proven.

# Michigan Courts

Michigan's courts are set up to best meet the needs of each type of case. DIRECTIONS: Test your knowledge of Michigan courts and their responsibilities by putting the correct letter in the space provided.



1. Find the court that tries lawsuits for more than \$1,000 against the State of Michigan. \_\_\_\_\_

2. Identify the court that reviews decisions from the Circuit Court. This court's decisions can be overruled by the Michigan Supreme Court. \_\_\_\_\_

3. Which court handles criminal cases punishable by less than one year in jail, as well as traffic violations? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Which division of Circuit Court has jurisdiction over family cases? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Where are cases involving parenting time, custody, and child support considered? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Which court is the highest court in the state? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Find the court that tries civil cases in which more than \$25,000 is sought from a party, and also serious criminal cases. \_\_\_\_\_

8. Where are civil cases for less than \$3,000 filed? \_\_\_\_\_

9. Find the court that deals with wills, estates, treatment of the mentally ill, and appoints/reviews guardianships. \_\_\_\_\_

A. **CIRCUIT COURT** The Circuit Court hears cases involving serious criminal offenses with a possible sentence of more than a year imprisonment, civil matters for more than \$25,000, and appeals from lower courts. \_\_\_\_\_

B. **SMALL CLAIMS COURT** Small Claims Court is the division of District Court which hears civil cases of \$3,000 or less. \_\_\_\_\_

C. **DISTRICT COURT** The District Court hears traffic matters, criminal cases in which the punishment is less than a year in jail, and civil cases in which no more than \$25,000 is sought. \_\_\_\_\_

D. **MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT** The Michigan Supreme Court is Michigan's highest court. Decisions of the Michigan Court of Appeals can be appealed here. No Michigan court can overrule a Supreme Court decision. \_\_\_\_\_

E. **COURT OF CLAIMS** The Court of Claims hears lawsuits for more than \$1,000 against the State of Michigan. \_\_\_\_\_

F. **MICHIGAN COURT OF APPEALS** The Michigan Court of Appeals hears appeals of decisions by lower Michigan courts. Only the Michigan Supreme Court can overrule decisions from the Court of Appeals. \_\_\_\_\_

G. **FAMILY DIVISION OF CIRCUIT COURT** The Family Division of Circuit Court hears cases about family matters, such as paternity, adoption, personal protection orders, delinquency, divorce, and more. \_\_\_\_\_

H. **FRIEND OF THE COURT OFFICE** The Friend of the Court Office is part of the Family Division of Circuit Court. It handles parenting time, custody, and child support issues. \_\_\_\_\_

I. **PROBATE COURT** The Probate Court handles wills, estates, orders treatment for the mentally ill, and appoints guardians. \_\_\_\_\_



# Careers in the Court System

Have you ever considered a career related to the law? When you think of legal careers, judges and lawyers probably come to mind first, but the Michigan court system employs people with a variety of skills, education, and experience.

## Bailiff

A bailiff is an officer of the court in charge of the care of prisoners during the trial and responsible for guarding the jury and preserving order in the court.



## Court Administrator

A professional person, usually with a bachelor's degree and court experience, or a graduate degree in law or a business-related field. This person directs the non-judicial aspects of a court, such as personnel, budgeting, and jury management.

## Court Clerk

The court clerk is the official custodian of all permanent records pertaining to the court's jurisdiction.

## Court Reporter/Recorder

A professional person with specialized training who must pass a certification examination. This person is responsible for taking down everything that is said during a court proceeding. They record the information through a special kind of shorthand writing or computer or recording device.

## District Court Probation Officer/Agent

A professional person, usually with a bachelor's degree, who works directly with adults of convicted misdemeanors and who are currently on probation. They oversee the court's probationary order, conduct pre-sentence investigations, and perform other court duties.

## Friend of the Court Investigator

A professional staff person, with a bachelor's degree (and sometimes a master's degree), who works directly with people involved in a domestic relations matter. Their responsibilities include enforcement of custody, parenting-time, and child support orders.

## Friend of the Court Mediator

A professional person, usually with a master's degree, who works directly with people in a domestic relations matter. This person acts as a neutral third-party in resolving problems related to child custody or parenting-time.

## Judge/Justice

A judge or justice is a public official, elected to administer law in a court of justice and who is given the authority to make decisions in civil and criminal proceedings. In Michigan, to be qualified to serve as a judge of a trial court, a judge of the Court of Appeals, or a justice of the Supreme Court, a person must be licensed to practice law in Michigan and have practiced law for at least 5 years.



## Juvenile Probation Officer/Caseworker

A professional person, with a bachelor's degree and in-service training, who works directly with children on probation and their families. They oversee the court's probationary order and develop case plans.

## Lawyer



A lawyer is a professional who has earned a college degree plus a degree from an accredited law school. A lawyer must also pass a test, called a bar exam, and be certified by the State Bar of Michigan to practice within the state. Lawyers usually specialize in a particular area of the law. Some prosecute or defend those accused of crimes (criminal law). Others represent governments, businesses, or people in matters of civil law, such as contracts, wills, environmental law, or real estate transactions. A number of lawyers become judges. Still others use their legal training in other fields, such as education or business.

## Paralegal/Legal Assistant

Paralegals, also called legal assistants, assist lawyers. Often, they interview clients, maintain client records, conduct legal research, and draft letters and legal documents. They usually earn a specialized degree at a community college, four-year college or university, business school, or for-profit school.



# Justices of the Michigan Supreme Court



## Interesting Facts about the Supreme Court

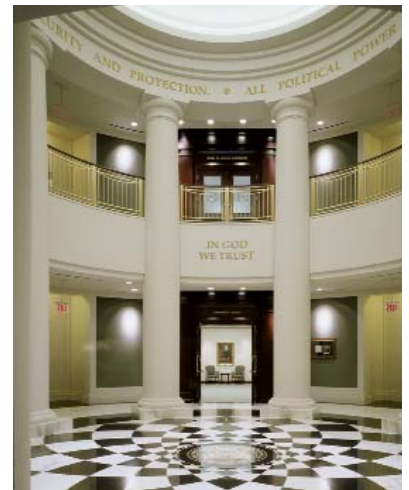
- 7 justices, elected to 8-year terms. Justices may run for election until 70 years of age.
- Nominated by political parties, but elected on the nonpartisan ballot.
- Chief Justice elected to a 2-year term by members of the Supreme Court.

Sitting (left to right): Justice Michael F. Cavanagh, Chief Justice Clifford W. Taylor, Justice Elizabeth A. Weaver. Standing (left to right): Justice Robert P. Young, Jr., Justice Marilyn Kelly, Justice Maura D. Corrigan, Justice Stephen J. Markman.

## Michigan Hall of Justice

The Michigan Hall of Justice, dedicated October 8, 2002, is the first permanent home for the judicial branch of government in the state's history. Built of limestone and capped by a glass dome, the six-story Hall of Justice stands at the west end of the capitol mall. Facing the State Capitol, it stands independent yet in relation to the location of the executive and legislative branches of government, symbolic of how our government works.

Four words—freedom, truth, equality and justice—are etched in marble at the entrance of the Hall of Justice. These concepts, the foundations of our constitution, invite reflection by all who enter.



6th floor rotunda  
& dome.

2nd floor rotunda.



## Interesting Facts about the Hall of Justice

- 6 stories.
- 10 elevators.
- 16-foot skylight dome.
- 224 windows.
- 1,200 interior doors.
- 2,930 tons of steel.
- 14,000 pieces of limestone.
- 16,000 cubic yards of concrete.
- 25,000 visitors per year.
- 280,000 square feet.